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Evaluating the Need to Implement the Middle School D.A.R.E. Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

All law enforcement agencies must recognize and indoctrinate themselves on issues relevant to juvenile crime and safety within the community and schools. Juvenile use of drugs and violent behavior is accelerating quickly in most areas.

This analysis inspects the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) curriculum that is currently implemented at the elementary degree. It further inquires the documentation supporting the necessity for implementing the Middle School/Jr. High D.A.R.E. curriculum to the middle school students.

The intention of the project is to identify problem areas within the middle school atmosphere. Also, to assemble and collect statistical data from local students regarding drug use, violent behavior, safety, and feelings for the conceivable implementation of the D.A.R.E. curriculum within the middle schools.

Along with reinforcing documentation and clear affirmation, a recommendation could be made to the Pflugerville Police Department and the Pflugerville Independent School District for the implementation of the D.A.R.E. Program within the middle school curriculum.

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Introduction

The theme of this research paper is to evaluate the necessity for implementing the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program into the middle school curriculum. The prospect of this research is to assist the Pflugerville Police Department and the Pflugerville Independent School District administration in resolving the necessity to commence the D.A.R.E. curriculum in the four middle schools within the district, two of which are in the city limits of Pflugerville.

For some years now, alcohol and drug abuse have been labeled as one of the main problems that plague society (Slobodia & David, 1997). The concern at this time is the absence of a drug intervention program of any kind in the middle schools. It has been reported in recent studies that there are no drug-free schools in America (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1997). Many of societies children experiment and explore with dangerous drugs such as alcohol and tobacco (DeJong, 1986). The omission of a drug intervention and violence prevention program within the middle school could contribute to the high number of calls of service for law enforcement officials. A contributing factor may be the absence of an officer. Middle school students, while in the elementary grades, became accustomed to D.A.R.E. Officers in the schools. Rapport was built between the school staff, students, and D.A.R.E. Officers. Officers working with students daily accomplished this. D.A.R.E. Officers became role models and friends to the students. Having a police presence on the school grounds may contribute to lowering juvenile crime. However, funding has been a large problem with having officers placed in the middle schools. But without intervention, by law enforcement and school

administration working together, juvenile crime rate at the middle school degree could intensify.

The proposed audience of this investigation will be the Pflugerville Police Department and the administration of the Pflugerville Independent School District. Intelligence will be gathered from independent studies, textbooks, and law enforcement periodicals. A survey done of the Pflugerville middle school students will also be conducted in this research. More than fifty independent research studies have documented that D.A.R.E. reduces drug use, increases communication with parents, and increases positive views of the police after only seventeen one-hour lessons in elementary school (Boudreau, 2000).

The calculated end result of this research is to exhibit to the Pflugerville Police Department and the Pflugerville Independent School District the essential urgency for D.A.R.E. Officers/curriculum to be utilized within the middle schools. With the D.A.R.E. Officer's involvement, the combination of intervention and curriculum guidance, drug abuse and violent behavior may decline. Predominately, the safety and well being of the staff and students will be immensely enhanced. A growing relationship will flourish and progress between the faculty, students, and law enforcement due to the intervention of the D.A.R.E. Officer, as well.

Review of Literature

D.A.R.E. first started in the classrooms of the City of Los Angeles, California in 1983 (Rosenbaum & Hanson, 1998). This program was first introduced to fifth graders. The D.A.R.E. curriculum and training was offered nation wide by 1987. Its primary focus was the delivery of a formal drug resistance and violence reduction curriculum by specially trained uniformed police officers to students in the fifth and seventh grades (Carter, 1995). Since the training started, the D.A.R.E. program has expanded to grades kindergarten through the twelfth.

The goal of the D.A.R.E. program is to equip students with the information and the skills needed to resist peer pressure and say “no” to alcohol and drug use. This curriculum employs a comprehensive strategy designed not only to teach facts, but to improve attitudes, enhance self-esteem, and help students develop their decision making skills by looking into the consequences of risky behavior. The D.A.R.E. program consists of seventeen weekly lessons at the elementary level. The middle school level receives a ten week program. D.A.R.E. Officers utilize a variety of activity-oriented techniques that involve students in group discussions, healthy exchanges of ideas, and role playing exercises (Battjes, 1987).

D.A.R.E. is a good example of community policing because it seeks to stop drug involvement before it starts. This proactive policing is seen by many in law enforcement as better than traditional reactive policing. D.A.R.E. allows young people to get to know one officer in something other than a “blue light” setting. This is good for the students and the officers. Some chiefs and sheriffs believe D.A.R.E. is worth doing just for its community policing value (Newman, 1996 b).

A study was completed on the comparison of school-based programs to meet criteria based on National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) standards. It was found that D.A.R.E. met all standards defined by NIDA including prosocial bonding to school and community, appropriate years of intervention, and targets most critical age groups (Stoil & Hill, 1987).

A report was done on the short-term effectiveness of the D.A.R.E. program. Seventh graders who had completed the D.A.R.E. education course as sixth graders were asked to respond to a questionnaire designed to assess the impact of the drug education course on their behavior. Students reported lower use of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs since graduating from sixth grade than students who did not have D.A.R.E. (DeJong, 1987).

Consequently, a study in the state of Kentucky showed that students needed a “booster” session in the middle school degree to sustain positive effects. Students in the middle school require a greater attention to interrelationships, individual-level characteristics, and social context (Clayton, Cattarello, & Johnstone, 1996). D.A.R.E.’s long-term success depends on the continual reinforcements of its message by families, the community, clergy, schools, and society in general. Supporters of D.A.R.E. argue that many of its benefits are not being measured, such as the positive effect of having police instructors interact with students, teachers, and school administrators in the delivery of a positive message to students (Sharp, 1998). This support contributes to the continuation of the program in the middle school degree.

D.A.R.E. focuses its attention on the students in the senior grade level of elementary schools, usually fifth grade. These young people have not yet progressed

from the sheltered environment of the elementary school to the social climate of middle school in which students are usually forced for the first time to make a decisions that could effect the rest of their lives. In some cases it has been found to be the middle school level in which young people are first likely to be led by their peers to experiment with drugs such as tobacco and alcohol. By instructing the D.A.R.E. curriculum in the elementary school levels, it is believed that the students will be more receptive to intervention education. Introductory lessons are provided to the kindergarten through the fourth grade. This sets the scene for future D.A.R.E. instruction and allows the student body, at all levels, to grow accustom to the officer being within the school. With time, the D.A.R.E. Officer becomes a confidant, friend, and ally to the students (Hanson & McNeal, 1997). The officer also leaves a lasting impression on the students and their families (Newman, 1996 a).

Presently, D.A.R.E. is taught in forty-one countries and in eleven languages. This course has spread widely due to its success and popularity. Most states in the United States take part in this program. Each particular state's board of education or similar agency has approved the curriculum as an acceptable life skills instruction program (Texas DARE Institute, 1998).

The Pflugerville Police Department, in cooperation with the Pflugerville Independent School District, began instructing the D.A.R.E. curriculum in 1987. The school district signed a contract with the police department and contributed financially to the implementation of the program. The program was a success among the faculty, students, and parents. As the community of Pflugerville grew in population, so did the D.A.R.E. program. There are currently five elementary schools in the city limits of

Pflugerville. The Pflugerville Police Department has two full-time D.A.R.E. Officers providing service to over six hundred and fifty fifth graders and approximately three thousand kindergarten through fourth grade students.

There are currently two middle schools within the city limits of Pflugerville. These schools do not offer a drug intervention or violent behavior reduction program such as D.A.R.E. at this time. The Pflugerville Police Department does employ two School Resource Officers, which are each stationed at the middle schools. This investigation will look into the ways that the Pflugerville Police Department can better serve the school's faculty and students by implementing the D.A.R.E. curriculum within the middle schools.

Methodology

The original D.A.R.E. core curriculum by itself will not always work. The program must be followed-up in the middle schools. Studies prove time and time again on the outcome. D.A.R.E. does place drug education in the school districts, however, it must be reemphasized in the middle schools (Ringwalt, Greene, Ennett, Iachan, & Clayton, 1994).

D.A.R.E. in Texas is growing. The curriculum has had tremendous impact on schools, families, and communities (Landry, 2000). On a local level, the Pflugerville Police Department validated its own D.A.R.E. program. Five hundred ninety local seventh graders were surveyed. The number of students who responded is unknown due to lost data. Students were asked if D.A.R.E. was helpful to them in any way and should D.A.R.E. be implemented in the middle school setting (Lee, 1999). These questions are important in analyzing whether to implement the D.A.R.E. curriculum in the middle school setting.

Pflugerville Police Department again in 2002 surveyed the seventh graders to see if the need and desire for the middle school curriculum had changed in the recent years (See Appendix). Six hundred twenty-seven surveys went out and were picked up by faculty/staff to insure a one hundred percent return (Griffith, 2002).

Findings

Numerous studies have showed the effectiveness of the D.A.R.E. curriculum. One inclusive study is that of the state of Ohio. The study surveyed 3150 Ohio eleventh graders. This study found that with D.A.R.E. being administered in the fifth grade and then followed up on in the seventh grade only twenty-seven percent of the students experimented with drugs. Students that did not receive the curriculum showed a percentage of forty-two percent having experimented with drugs (Donnermeyer, 1995). The gap in students is enough for most school districts and law enforcement agencies to continue instructing the program in the schools. It should be noted that students receiving the D.A.R.E. curriculum only in the fifth grade showed percentage of thirty-seven having experimented with drugs. This reemphasizes the need for the program to be implemented in the middle school degree.

If there is not a intervention program such as D.A.R.E. in the middle school curriculum, it can be surmised that drug use and violent behavior could increase at this level of education. A study in a Eureka, California middle school showed that an imperative component to reducing crime and drug usage on school grounds was adding a police officer. This officer, in turn, implemented the D.A.R.E. curriculum to the academic schedule. School crime, drug use, and violent behavior were dramatically reduced (Nicoll, 1995).

Administering the D.A.R.E. curriculum in the elementary schools has helped many children. Due to the rising numbers of episodes of violence in schools and increasing peer pressure a need is present to put into effect the D.A.R.E. program in the middle school degree. Presently, the Pflugerville Police Department employees the

elementary D.A.R.E. program. School Resource Officers (SRO) have recently been placed in both middle schools within the city limits of Pflugerville. These officers are not currently instructing students in any form of drug intervention or violence prevention.

One benefit of the middle school D.A.R.E. curriculum is the time the officer will spend with the students. If the student body is provided with an opportunity to get to know the officer in a less formal atmosphere, a more mutual respect is obtained. Research has shown the importance of the follow-up sessions in the middle degree settings. The cooperation and communication among school districts and law enforcement must strive to continue.

According to Griffith, (2002), ninety-seven percent of the student body now requested that the D.A.R.E. Middle School Curriculum be administered in the schools. This study showed an increase over the past three years (See Figure 1). This may have been achieved through D.A.R.E. officers working closely with the students.

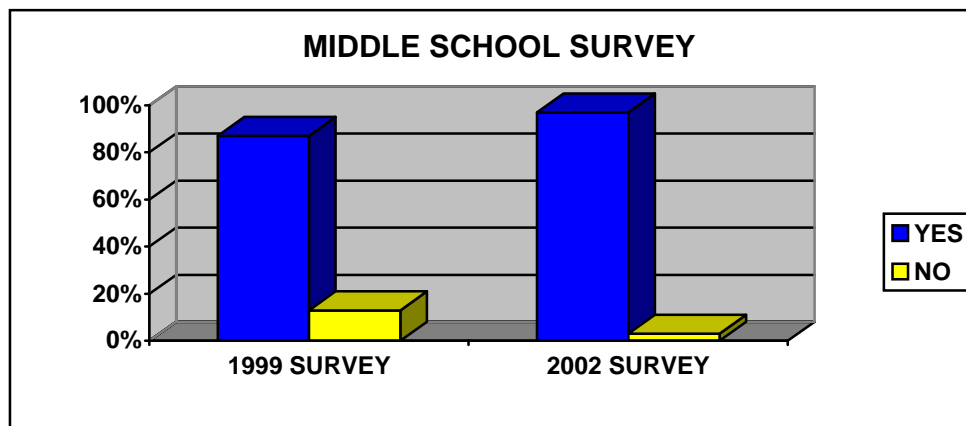


Figure 1. Survey results of seventh grade students requesting the Middle School D.A.R.E. Program in 1999 and 2002.

Eighty-six percent of the students in this same research reported that if they were involved in a crises, they would request their D.A.R.E. officer be included for their assistance (See Figure 2). The reasoning behind this may be due to the rapport that was built between the students and the officers.

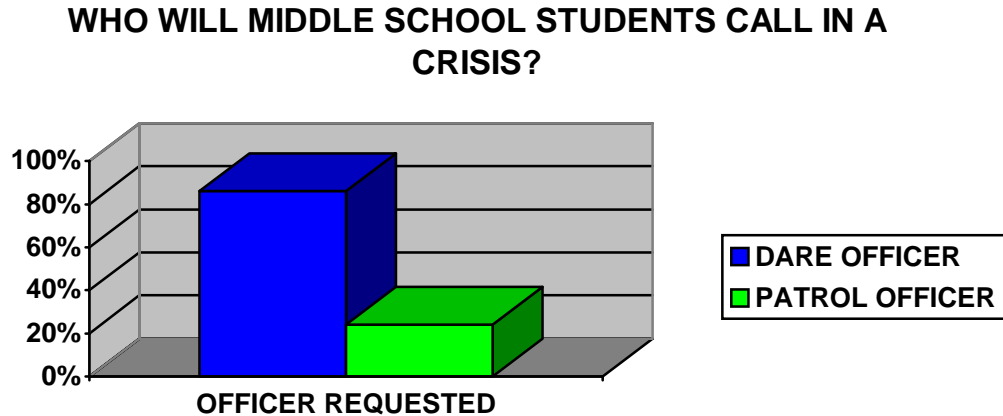


Figure 2. Survey results showing which officer students would prefer to deal with in a crisis.

The opportunity exists for the two Pflugerville middle schools in the city limits to implement the D.A.R.E. curriculum. The Pflugerville Police Department and the Pflugerville Independent School District have had a strong relationship working together to prevent or solve incidents involving students. Based on the response from the community, support would be positive. The implementation of the middle school curriculum would benefit the school district and the police department. Cost could be offset between both agencies. Both departments would benefit from the officer's instruction of the D.A.R.E. program. The benefits of the D.A.R.E. program far out way the cost. The children of the community are worth the effort.

Discussion/Conclusion

The intent of the study was to examine the present D.A.R.E. program and further inspect the evidence that supports the need for implementing D.A.R.E. in the middle school curriculum. Data was compiled, studied and research supports the idea that the program is needed in the middle school degree. Research has proven all middle schools show an increase in violent behavior and drug usage (Wright, 1997). Based on research by credible sources and verified by documented publications, a conclusion can be made in this individual study. That is, the implementation of the middle school D.A.R.E. program would benefit the students, school district, and community.

It is recommended that the Pflugerville Police Department and the Pflugerville Independent School District proceed with implementing the D.A.R.E. curriculum in the middle school degree. Funding for this program should be a shared responsibility. The benefits of having a specially trained D.A.R.E. Officer on the school grounds has been proven through convincing research. This would greatly benefit the students, school, and community. Public support in Pflugerville is present for the implementation for the D.A.R.E. program in the middle schools. The middle school staff and students would feel safer in their environment with a police presence. The school district may anticipate a decrease in violent behavior and drug use among students.

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APPENDIX

Pflugerville Police Department DARE Unit 7th Grade Survey

Current School _____ Previous School _____ Date _____

Your Gender ____M ____F

A. DARE Program Overview by Students

Place a checkmark under the appropriate column if the DARE lesson was helpful.

DARE lessons	YES	NO
1. Understanding the Effects of Mind Altering Drugs		
2. Considering Consequences		
3. Changing Beliefs About Drug Use		
4. Ways to Say No		
5. Building Self-esteem		
6. Learning Assertiveness—A Response Style		
7. Managing Stress Without Taking Drugs		
8. Reducing Violence		
9. Combating Media Influences on Drug Use and Violence		
10. Making Decisions About Risky Behavior		
11. Saying Yes to Positive Alternatives		
12. Resisting Gangs and Group Violence		
Count the marks in each column Total		

B. The Use of the Information Learned in DARE Put to Use in Middle School

Place a checkmark under the appropriate answer.

The DARE Lessons have helped me in the following areas:	YES	NO
1. Resisting peer pressure		
2. Considering the consequences of drug use		
3. Saying no to drug offers		
4. In building self-esteem for others and myself		
5. Being confident in myself (assertiveness)		
6. Being better at handling stress		
7. More capable in settling arguments and avoiding fights		
8. Know the difference between a commercial and a public service announcement		
9. Looking at the consequences before doing something risky		
10. Being active in my school, community, and church (positive alternatives)		
11. Saying no to joining a gang or hanging out with violent people		
12. I understand more about drugs now than I did before graduating DARE		
Count the marks in each column Total		

Overall, was the DARE Program helpful to you in any way? _____

Would you recommend keeping DARE in Pflugerville for future students? _____

Would you recommend a Junior High DARE Program be started in your school? _____

If you were in a crisis, would you want your DARE officer involved or a patrol officer? _____

C. Comments (optional) _____
